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A STUDY IN CAMPAIGN AUDIENCES.

BY THE HON. LLOYD BRYCE.

HOWEVER we analyze the vote cast for Mr. Bryan, its size indicates that the principles he represents will hardly be relinquished at once, and that in four years the battle may have to be fought again. In short, we seem to have rather earned a truce than a victory. If the new administration is successful, if values rise and business generally with wages improves, the next fight will be less severe. If the new administration fails, the fight will be correspondingly more bitter.

Everything about Mr. Bryan is, therefore, interesting, as everything about this unique canvass is instructive for future reference. Under these circumstances I accept the invitation of the editor of the REVIEW to describe a few of the great public meetings of the recent campaign. I had the very best possible opportunity for observation, as I accompanied Mr. Bourke Cockran in his three trips. The first lay through Illinois, Nebraska, and Minnesota; the second through West Virginia, Ohio, Indiana, Iowa, and back through Illinois and Michigan; the third through Kentucky, Missouri, Virginia; and taken together they consumed over seven weeks. Thus we visited all of those States that are usually called the doubtful States, mixing with all classes of the community in public and in private gatherings. In fact, we traveled 10,300 miles and, with the exception of Mr. Bryan, I believe covered a greater amount of territory than anyone else has covered in the canvass.

On the evening of our departure from New York I was passing the Fifth Avenue Hotel, when a carriage drove up to the door, accompanied by mounted policemen. The light from the street lamps shone on the waterproof capes of the escort, for it was raining violently, and, amid considerable commotion on the

part of a hastily gathered crowd, a gentleman descended. I was informed that it was Mr. Bryan returning from his Tammany Hall speech. An hour later, on reaching Jersey City, we discovered he was to be on the same train. Shortly after it started we sent in our cards, and sat with him half an hour in his state-room. He was lying down. A fine type of manhood he seemed, with his clean-cut profile and his winning manner, talking courteously on every subject. Unconsciously I was reminded of Edwin Booth as he must have been in his younger days, and taken in connection with all the circumstances of his whereabouts, of Booth on a wide-extended starring tour. His manner was simple and unaffected, and marked by a certain earnestness that added to his attractions. His only allusion to politics was to express contempt for Democrats who proposed to support the third ticket while really intending to vote for McKinley. As we had ourselves openly endorsed McKinley from the first, the remark contained no sting for us.

He left the train at an intermediate station during the night and to our surprise next day in West Virginia his car was again attached to ours. It was rather an awkward situation now. Crowds lined the course and at every station cheers for Bryan resounded. Every now and then he would address them from the rear platform.

In connection with these wayside gatherings—which were mostly drawn from the surrounding country—I may be permitted to state that rural Populism is very different from that of the city. For the former embraces, I think, a far larger proportion of the well-to-do. It must not be forgotten, however, that social considerations are active in the country districts of the Middle States, while in the Southern and Southwestern States actual ostracism meets the seceder from the so-called Democratic fold. Besides, many who would follow their own dictates, such as small tradesmen, etc., whose business depends on the farmer, fear to lose their custom by a departure from the prevailing sentiment. All this makes Populism seem in the country well-nigh universal. But in the towns, and particularly in the great cities, “Hurrah for Bryan” seems more often the shibboleth of disappointed hopes.

While Mr. Bryan’s speeches lack argument, and in print appear diffuse and tawdry, they attract the hearer. “What did he

say?" I asked of an enthusiastic bystander at one of the stations where he spoke a few words. "I don't know and I don't care," was the reply, "it was the way he said it." All this may be the effect of personality, of voice, of persuasiveness. But I think what really gives him his power is a certain note of prophecy, of self-believed inspiration, that he unconsciously breathes; for deep down in our national character is a strong religious bias, often developing among the emotional into hysteria and running into strange excesses. At one of his meetings later on in the campaign, I heard the flashlight was so arranged as to cast an aureole about his head when the crowd pressed round him in great numbers to touch the hem of his garments. The references in his speeches also, to the Crown of Thorns and to labor nailed to a golden cross play upon the same chord. In short, it is not alone the rôle of social reformer which he fills—there is the flavor of a wider promise in his utterances, and this it is that gives him, I think, his peculiar hold.

I have forgotten the station at which he left us in West Virginia, but an enormous crowd was awaiting him, and a committee marched him off to an adjoining hotel. As he passed us his appearance had entirely changed. He showed the strain of the campaign. He wore an expression, too, that I can hardly define, but somehow he gave me the impression of a man whose mind might at any time break down. And as the cheers died away and the train rolled on I wondered what would be the ultimate fate of this Rienzi of the West.

The most singular phenomenon about Western meetings is the disproportion between their size and the town that produces them. Why, they not only often seem to embrace the whole population of the town, but of several towns conjointly, and one might almost infer that their extent is in inverse ratio to the population they had to draw upon.

A curious psychological study they offer, too, these vast gatherings. I have often imagined the emotions of individuals are intensified by their combined numbers.

Victor Hugo in his lectures used to address himself always to the most stolid countenance among his hearers, feeling that if he could make an impression on him, the rest would follow. Dion Boucicault, the actor, assured me he always addressed himself to the occupants of the galleries, who, being drawn from

the poor and consequently less conventional elements of society, were quicker to respond, and consequently to encourage him. A popular lecturer whom I know regards his audience as one huge, conglomerate pink face—that smiles, that frowns, that weeps, that quivers—as a species of living composite photograph of the whole.

A clever stump speaker in explaining his success attributed it to the fact that he always regarded his hearers as children, and couched his remarks in language that the juvenile mind would grasp.

“An audience is a woman,” a great French orator, now deceased, once observed to me, “subject to the same general rules that apply to the fickle sex. At one time it must be persuaded, at another caressed, at another bullied. It is full of moods.” There is certainly something feminine in the quickness of a crowd’s emotions. The intonation of a word may cause your audience to fawn upon you, or on the other hand to turn around and rend you. Perhaps it is half woman, half tiger.

The Omaha meeting presented a wide gamut of human emotions. Imagine several acres of humanity crowded well nigh to suffocation in a vast, but fragile frame structure, with the aisles and passages so blocked that the speakers could with difficulty force their way to the platform. In the centre and on the right the people were seated and mostly orderly. But on the left and in the aisles they were all on their feet shouting vociferously. The presiding officer vainly endeavored to make himself heard. As he proceeded, the noise and confusion increased, extending to the centre and right. The platform, too, was jammed, and as you sat there, you could imagine yourself on some low-lying strip of land, with an angry tidal wave ready to engulf you.

When Mr. Cockran rose to speak, one unhappily-turned phrase, one single look of flinching, would have precipitated a struggle, which, in the crowded condition of the building, might have been attended with a panic and loss of life. As it was, the phrase was turned happily and aroused their curiosity; another—between the shouts—attracted their interest; and in twenty minutes a pin could have been heard to drop. Then the orator went on to chide them, and, taking the late disorder as an object-lesson of what Populism would mean if enthroned in Washington, he spoke of patriotism and the country endangered by anarchy. As he pro-

ceeded women became hysterical, men wept, and at the close, the sea, now changed from uproarious dissent to approval, swept forward and carried him in wild enthusiasm off the platform.

Here we have an audience—hostile as a whole—at least one-quarter of which had gone with the deliberate purpose of breaking up the meeting at any cost—an attempt, organized and disciplined. We had been informed of trouble before we arrived in the town, and later in the day, in the town itself, from the crowd that surrounded the hotel to meet us, a man drew me to one side and begged me to warn my friend that he would never be allowed to speak in Mr. Bryan's State. The whole meeting was against the speaker—uproariously and bitterly. To what psychological cause can we attribute the change from hostility to a demonstration in his favor that I have never seen equalled? I speak not without experience, for I have attended public meetings in many parts of the world.

It was not alone his gift of language; nor entirely his argument, great as it was; it was not even the recognition that a master was before them shedding a new light upon a grave question. All these were factors in the change. There was also the instinctive appreciation of an underlying sympathy with them, on the part of the speaker, which disarmed their distrust, and the vast gathering responded to it with greater quickness and fervor than any one of them would have done individually.

These public meetings are significant, as showing how disorder, confined at first to a few perhaps, gradually extends, unless immediately checked.

At St Louis the disturbance began on the outside. A business men's delegation, several thousand strong, came to the hotel to escort us; they were headed by a brass band.

Exasperated by this sign of approval, the hoodlum element congregated around the hotel doors in great numbers. Now, escorts have a disagreeable tendency in a crowded street to get ahead of their convoy, and particularly when inspired by the strains of music. It was so in the present case. The business men got a little ahead, so that our actual escort consisted of a body of Populists, who danced about our carriage to the refrain of "Hurrah for Bryan," diversifying their antics by occasionally shaking a fist in disagreeable proximity to our faces. Nor was our uninvited bodyguard willing to leave us on our arrival at

the hall ; for they burst through the doors, driving those waiting about the portals ahead of them into the already packed building, and blocking up the aisles and every available space. When you reflect that this was the convention hall where so short a time before Mr. McKinley had been nominated, you can imagine the crowd. It was variously estimated at between 15,000 and 20,000 people. I had already asked the Chief of Police to be particular in keeping the aisles clear. He had not expected, I suppose, this sudden invasion.

This clearance of the aisles is a very important matter. The eye of the speaker is like that of the lion tamer, and the entire audience must be subject to his gaze. There is a sort of silver thread between their eyes and his which, once broken, the spell is destroyed and his control over them is lost. There is another advantage in keeping the aisles clear ; it will diminish the panic and the consequent loss of life which sooner or later I believe is destined to come in some of those enormous political gatherings. I remember with a cold shudder a balcony in a temporary frame structure. It actually seemed possessed—as it swayed with the changing emotions of its occupants. Below were perhaps a hundred persons, men and women, jammed together like sardines, as if awaiting, with that calm patience which distinguishes us as a people in moments of danger, its collapse. At one moment it seemed absolutely impossible that it should not shoot out from its supports and descend with a crash. Each burst of anger, every round of applause, it visibly responded to, and the entire building, being of wood, vibrated in sympathetic response, like a vast sounding-box.

At the Evansville meeting the resemblance to a sounding-box was rather due to the peculiar behavior of the disturbers than to the mere nature of the structure. When we entered the hall there was a considerable mob outside trying to press in and a considerable number inside trying to get out.

This created great confusion and scuffling about the doors. The police succeeded, however, in clearing the exits, whereupon the mob, enraged by the action of the authorities, scattered down an alleyway on which the building sided. Here they remained till the meeting closed, shouting threats of hanging, blowing horns, and singing, and by way of accompaniment, pounding, kicking, and battering on the walls of the building.

It was like talking in an iron foundry—for, the evening being sultry, an upper tier of windows had been left open. As results prove it was the most effective meeting, however, held in Indiana. When the disorder was at its height, and the audience showed signs of going out and suppressing it themselves, Mr. Cockran stayed them. "No, no," he cried, "this noise, this confusion, this disorder, is my best argument. Behold the Chicago platform in operation!"

When we left the hall a rush was made upon the carriage. It was, however, stayed by the police.

The appearance of this crowd was worse than that of any I had seen. The faces of the men were such as you might expect to meet in the crowded cities of an old civilization, and not in an enterprising, flourishing, and prosperous young town. The oldest resident of the place, who was one of the reception committee, said as we were driving to the station that he wondered where these people had come from. He thought he knew every type in Evansville, but he had never seen this one before. I remember to have seen such faces only once before in my life, and that was at Victor Noir's funeral, in Paris, when I was a boy at school. They were the type of men who smell disturbance and discord from afar.

The hostility they evinced was exceptional, however. I wish to say, and I will say it here, that while we met bitterness—bitterness that increased with the campaign—and continual disorder, we encountered little vindictiveness.

Never can I remember a remark that by the wildest exaggeration could be construed into a personal insult. Yet in these Populists' eyes we were coming to destroy the gilded fabrics of their hopes—to try and prove what was, was right.

Opposed as I am to the tenets of Populism, revolutionary as I consider their propaganda, a sort of sadness would steal over me at the very success of our meetings, for each one might help to destroy the *silver* lining to so many clouds.

These people believe, and believe honestly, that free silver is the panacea for every financial evil, and the earnestness of their belief has dignity and pathos in it, mistaken as I consider that belief to be.

Speaking about public meetings, who, in his own peculiar way, had a more extraordinary power over them than poor John

Fellows? It was in Memphis that we ran across him. Peace be to his *manes*.

In the afternoon we went for a walk. I can see him now, as he stopped for a moment on the lofty suspension bridge which airily spans, like the hope of youth, the Mississippi River. To the right, up the stream, stood the city, perched on its lofty banks. On the left the sun was setting. Away beneath our feet a large Mississippi steamer, with its double smokestacks and its huge rear paddle-wheel, was passing under the bridge. She seemed to recall thoughts of other days, and his eye followed her sadly as she passed on down the stream. He came to the meeting in the evening and, being called upon to say a few words at the close, said them, as he always did, pointedly and eloquently.

The Norfolk meeting began with about half the audience standing up, then forming into angry groups. Each group had its own orator. The noise and confusion was increased by an accompaniment of falling benches.

A very singular circumstance I observed about this Norfolk meeting. During its entire continuation the audience, while subject to every other emotion, displayed no susceptibility to humor.

Dion Boucicault, to whom I have already referred, once told me that during a season's performance in London he had become aware that on certain nights his audiences would show a greater responsiveness to the humorous parts of his cast, on another night to the pathetic. So struck was he with the fact that he repeated it to several of his professional friends, and they resolved in their own performances to make observations and to compare notes. The result was the discovery of an unmistakable uniformity of sensitiveness each evening on the part of the audiences throughout the town. I believe the cause was attributed to atmospheric influences.

A like comparison of notes might be made by our different stump orators in the next campaign.

The disturber of the public meeting, being one of its integral parts and so large an influence in it, deserves—in his individual capacity—a passing glance in such a paper as I am writing. He appears in various forms and offers an interesting study in each.

The mere representative of disorder who shouts "Hurrah for Bryan!" belongs to the hoodlum class. Then there is the fanatic,

often partially educated, and occasionally a member of one of the liberal professions, perhaps a school-teacher.

I remember distinctly a man at Parkersburg who belonged to the latter class—of medium height, with a circle of dark beard, and a Quaker-like hat. Nothing would silence him. Again and again he rose to propound some question—such as the ratio of values—in a harsh, monotonous voice—determined and invincible—alike callous to argument and to ridicule.

Then there is the agitator who hopes to receive money or some other recognition from his organization for his services. He is usually fierce of expression—well dressed, but he wilts early. Then there is the crank pure and simple, long haired, wild eyed—the type of man who in ordinary times haunts the newspaper office with some scheme of aerial navigation or perpetual motion. There is also the flippant disturber who breaks in with some inconsequential question or witticism; usually he is the wag of the neighborhood. All these several types gain great local celebrity if they can succeed in confusing some well-known speaker. For months afterwards they are pointed out in the street as having “broken up” the famous Mr. So-and-So, and they hold forth as shining lights in the country store or in the particular saloon which they honor with their presence. But woe betide them if they fail! I can see a group of young men, congregated on the rear of the very stage on which we were, shouting “Hurrah for Bryan!” The speaker turned, and under his ridicule one after the other gradually dropped off like pears from a tree, leaving but the ringleader, who sat perched high up on some paraphernalia of stage machinery—for the hall was a theatre. A girl was near him and she tried to draw him away, but he resisted yet awhile. At last the ridicule focussed upon him was too much for him; he slunk down out of sight, pulled open a trap door leading below the stage and escaped into the street.

Some of Mr. Cockran’s replies to these disturbers may well be recorded. For instance, to the young man who, interrupting, first declared himself a workingman, but went on to specify his avocation as the study of medicine: “Thank you,” replied the speaker; “I have generally found,” he continued with a sly smile, “that the work of the Populist is seldom of a manual nature. He is either a lawyer, who lives on other people’s quarrels; a journalist, who records them; or a politician, who foments

them. You have added a fourth profession to the list. I trust you will extend your services to your political friends. The number of our opponents will certainly be reduced."

"How about the unemployed?" shouted a voice from the gallery of a great hall as the orator was explaining that three days' wages now had the purchasing value of five in 1873. "The honest unemployed, who really want work, are seeking it," shouts back Mr. Cockran. "The incorrigibly idle, and those who would never work even if it were offered them, are trying to break up orderly meetings."

At another gathering a tall, cadaverous-looking individual of the crank type, emerges from the crowd in the rear, comes excitedly down the main aisle and stops within twenty feet of the platform.

"Is not the legislation of this country," he asks, "under the control of the money class?"

"It is," replies the speaker. "And I thank God that it is so. For in this country the money class embraces everyone outside of an alms-house."

Occasionally, when the audience have been won over by the orator, they not only prevent but resent interruptions, and the cry of "throw him out" becomes general.

At Detroit, a man at the far end of the hall, in one of the aisles, was asking questions of the speaker—by no means in an offensive spirit, though in a persistent, annoying manner—when there was a rush in his direction. He was struck on the head, and, in the *mêlée* which followed, though I was too far removed to see the finale, I understood he was ejected very much the worse for wear.

Of all our meetings this one I think was the most instructive. It consisted of about ten thousand people and was gotten up by the labor unions for the purpose of propounding certain questions to Mr. Cockran. These were delivered in writing through the Chairman, and were answered offhand. Though considerable hostility was shown at first the meeting closed with the best possible feeling. Made up as the audience was entirely of working men its earnestness was impressive, and in the obvious yielding of their doubts to the explanations of the speaker, I read a happy augury, not only for the outcome of the campaign, but for the eventual settlement of that wider question—the true relations between labor and capital.

LLOYD BRYCE.